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General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

219th Meeting
Monday, 6 April 1998, 10 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Martynov . . . . . (Belarus)

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

Opening of the session

The Chairman: I declare open the 1998 substantive session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission.

Statement by the Chairman

The Chairman: At the outset I would like to most sincerely thank all the members of the Disarmament Commission for having elected me Chairman. In so doing they have conferred on me a singular honour and privilege. I would like also to express my gratitude to the members of the Eastern European Regional Group for nominating me and, in particular to the delegation of Slovakia for its constructive attitude.

Coming to the Disarmament Commission is, for me, very much like a homecoming, and I hope that with the support and understanding of Commission members, it will be, if not a sweet homecoming, then at least an enjoyable one. I shall rely again on the Commission's understanding, active participation and support in discharging my responsibilities.

Let me also express special appreciation to my predecessor in this post, Ambassador Andelfo García of Colombia, for his outstanding and invaluable contribution as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission.

Before we take up the first order of the day, allow me on behalf of all members of the Commission to extend the most cordial and warm welcome to Mr. Jin Yongjian, Under-Secretary-General for the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, which is responsible for servicing the Disarmament Commission; Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, whose Department will provide substantive support to the session of the Commission; and Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament. The presence of these high United Nations officials and internationally respected diplomats once again underlines the importance of the Disarmament Commission in general and the high expectations of Member States for this session in particular. For this show of support we are thankful to them.

In addition, I cannot but commend the Secretariat staff, and in particular the Secretary of the Disarmament Commission, Mr. Alasaniya, for the preliminary work they have done, the appropriate documentation they have prepared and their consistent commitment to the work of the Commission.

In past decades, the international community lived through periods of confrontation and a spiralling arms race. Yet its wisdom and accumulated experience helped mankind halt that trend and reconsider the past, thereby approaching the third millennium with considerable achievements in the area of disarmament and security. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT); the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction; and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their

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Destruction were signed, and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was extended for an indefinite term — all of this in the last two years alone. The number of States joining these important international instruments is growing steadily.

I should like to welcome today in particular an event which, as I understand it, took place concomitantly — and I hope not by mere accident — with the opening of this substantive session of the Disarmament Commission. This morning, according to the information I have received, the delegations of the United Kingdom and France deposited with the Secretary-General their ratification instruments on joining the CTBT.

The Commission has before it a number of topical disarmament issues. This year, which marks the thirtieth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Partial Test-Ban Treaty, the subject of creating nuclear-weapon-free zones is becoming increasingly relevant. The progress achieved lately in developing and observing agreements on such zones demonstrates vividly the international community's desire to establish and strengthen the nuclear-weapons non-proliferation regime. There is indeed clear evidence of this in the very fact that six resolutions dealing with this subject have already been adopted at the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. Along with the traditional nuclear-weapon-free zones in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and the South Pacific, new regional initiatives are emerging, their potential undoubtedly far from being exhausted.

Despite certain differences in approaches to the objectives, the agenda and the timing for the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (SSOD IV), the Commission can take heart from the shared need, as the third millennium looms, to take stock of the achievements and the failures and to work out recommendations for the future. I would rely on the wisdom and flexibility of all delegations in working out solutions by consensus to the aspects which still need to be agreed upon. I urge delegations, in working on this issue, to be cognizant of the fact that it is the third year that this item is being considered and that the Commission has to report it out.

The importance of elaborating "Guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament, with particular emphasis on consolidation of peace in the context of General Assembly resolution 51/45 N" cannot be overemphasized. The acute problems related to conventional arms are omnipresent and clearly affect international security and disarmament. In providing guidelines for the international community on the subject, the Commission will, in a substantive way, increase the contribution it has already made through working out guidelines on confidence-building measures and arms transfers.

The activities of the Disarmament Commission are of great significance at this decisive juncture. The Commission has a unique and undiminished role to play as a universal international body that allows an in-depth search for solutions to problems in the area of disarmament while relying on the widest possible participation by States and their synergetic wisdom. At the same time, the Commission has before it, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/12 B, a challenge to revitalize, rationalize and streamline its work. I hope a general understanding among the Member States will emerge on how we approach this goal.

I am convinced that the decisions that will be worked out and adopted at this substantive session of the Disarmament Commission will bring the international community one step closer to building the secure world it deserves.

Adoption of the agenda

The Chairman: As members of the Commission may recall, at the organizational session, the provisional agenda which is now before the Commission was considered and approved. If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to adopt the provisional agenda contained in document A/CN.10/L.42.

The provisional agenda was adopted.

Organization of work

The Chairman: At its organizational session, the Commission considered a series of organizational matters which included the provisional agenda, a Bureau for the 1998 session, the establishment of three Working Groups on three substantive agenda items, the appointment of Chairmen of the Working Groups and a decision on the date and duration of the 1998 substantive session.

In this regard, the Commission has elected Ecuador, Ireland and Peru as Vice-Chairmen of the Commission

and Mr. Vice Skračić of Croatia as Rapporteur for the 1998 session.

The Chairman and the Bureau are now continuing consultations to fill the remaining vacancies in the Bureau and among the chairmanships of the subsidiary bodies. I would take this opportunity to urge the regional Groups and their coordinators to be as prompt as possible in submitting their proposals on behalf of their respective Groups in order to finish this part of our important business. I expect us to have finished with this by the morning of Wednesday, 8 April.

I wish to inform the members of the Commission that, as a result of intensive consultations among Groups, we have a nomination from a regional Group. In this connection, I call on the representative of Portugal.

Mr. Vinhas (Portugal): My delegation, as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States, would like to inform the Commission that the Group has endorsed the candidature of Mr. Miguel Aguirre de Cárcer of the Spanish delegation to the post of Chairman of Working Group I on the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones.

The Chairman: I thank the Group of Western European and other States for this nomination. If I hear no objection, I shall take it that it is the wish of the Commission to elect Mr. Miguel Aguirre de Cárcer of Spain as Chairman of Working Group I.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I wish to extend my warmest congratulations to the newly elected member of the chairmanship of the working bodies, Mr. Aguirre de Cárcer, on his election.

I would like to discuss now the general programme of work for the current session, which is before the Commission in document A/CN.10/1998/CRP.1. The programme of work is an indicative timetable for the work of the Commission, subject to further adjustment, as necessary. With regard to the working timetable, the Secretariat has prepared and distributed the preliminary timetable for all three weeks of the work of the Commission. These three informal papers are also indicative. However, the first week's timetable will remain unchanged. As far as the second and third weeks are concerned, these two informal papers will be decided upon by the Bureau in consultation with the Chairmen of the Working Groups. Subsequently, the Secretariat will reissue these papers with necessary changes, if any.

As to the allocation of time for each agenda item, the principle of equal footing and flexibility for practical purposes will be observed. As I have noted before, the weekly timetable and programme of work will take into account the needs of each subsidiary body through consultations with the Chairmen of the Working Groups. Since, however, items 4 and 6 are in their second year of consideration, and every effort will have to be made to conclude item 5 on the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, which is in its third and final year, one might expect that this Working Group could require more meetings. Should this become evident, the Group will, of course, be given every consideration and cooperation to accommodate its busy schedule.

As members may notice, in document A/CN.10/1998/CRP.1, containing the general programme of work, four meetings have been allocated to the general exchange of views. I would like to ask delegations wishing to make statements to inscribe their names on the list of speakers with the Secretariat as soon as possible. The deadline for inscription on the list is 6 p.m. today. I am also informed that 25 copies of statements should be provided to the Secretariat.

If there is no objection, I shall take it that it is the wish of the Commission to proceed in this manner.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: In order to utilize efficiently the available conference resources, I would like to appeal to all members of the Disarmament Commission to be punctual in attending all scheduled meetings of the Commission.

Regarding documentation for the current session, I wish to point out that last year's report of the Disarmament Commission to the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, contained in document A/52/42, as well as documents listed in the report, will serve as important background documents for this session.

Previous reports of the Commission will, of course, also be useful for reference, especially with regard to the consideration of the item on the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. In the course of deliberations on various agenda items,

particularly items 4 and 6, which are in their second year of consideration, the Commission might expect a number of new documents to be submitted by delegations. I would urge those delegations to submit their working papers to the Secretariat as soon as possible to allow sufficient time for processing.

As has been the case in previous years, non-governmental organizations are welcome to attend the plenary meetings and meetings of the Committee of the Whole of the Disarmament Commission as observers.

General exchange of views

Mr. Yamaguchi (Japan): Let me express my gratitude for being the first speaker in this series of general statements at this year's substantive session of the Disarmament Commission. I sincerely hope that, through our deliberations, we can add something meaningful to the achievements that we have witnessed in disarmament in various frameworks — bilateral, regional and multilateral. I can assure you, Mr. Chairman, that you will have my delegation's full support and cooperation for the successful outcome of this session.

Allow me to state my delegation's views on the three topics of this year's session. I will begin with the guidelines on conventional arms control and disarmament.

In the disarmament community, we have recently heard many remarks about small arms and light weapons. Indeed, these weapons are being used as primary instruments of violence, causing a large number of casualties. The easy availability of such weapons has led to their accumulation, which in itself is of a destabilizing nature.

We have also witnessed an attempt to try to tackle the issue of small arms and light weapons in a comprehensive manner. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/70 B of 1995, a Panel of Governmental Experts was established and chaired by Ambassador Donowaki of Japan, and the results of their study were submitted to the General Assembly last year.

The report contains two groups of recommendations. The first group concerns measures to reduce the excessive and destabilizing accumulation and transfer of small arms and light weapons in specific regions of the world where conflicts are taking or have taken place. In this context, the Panel found the approach initiated by the United Nations in Mali and the surrounding West African nations significant. It is also noteworthy that the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) established a special task force on conflict, peace and development cooperation in 1995 and has been formulating guidelines on conflict, peace and development cooperation since 1996.

In this connection, my delegation welcomes the international conference on sustainable disarmament for sustainable development scheduled to be held in Brussels in October within the framework of the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD.

In one of its recommendations the Panel emphasizes the importance of developing guidelines for United Nations peacekeeping operations in their activities for post-conflict demobilization, with particular emphasis on collecting and disposing of small arms and light weapons. My country places the highest priority on this recommendation, and I would like to come back to it in the discussion in Working Group III.

The second group of recommendations concerns the prevention of future accumulation and transfer of small arms and light weapons. In this context, the Panel found that the guidelines for international arms transfers adopted by the Disarmament Commission in 1996 were excellent, and revision or improvement was not deemed necessary.

Last year, as a follow-up to this Panel report, the General Assembly adopted resolution 52/38 J. Again, it requested that the Secretary-General, with the assistance of a group of governmental experts, prepare a report to be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. We are told that the members of this new group will be appointed shortly. In order to facilitate their work, Japan will host a workshop this year.

Other specific efforts are also under way in various forums. An international conference on the moratorium on small-arms transfers in West Africa was held in Norway this April. Also relevant is the training seminar initiated by Germany and scheduled for June of this year, which focuses on Central Africa and emphasizes the importance of trainers in peace-building through practical disarmament measures.

All in all, these manifestations of concern are bound to drive the issues of small arms, light weapons and practical disarmament further up in our disarmament agenda. The Disarmament Commission has already made

some contributions in this respect and will rightly continue to do so. These efforts in various forums are not mutually exclusive, but naturally need to be coordinated in such a way as to achieve the utmost benefit.

Let me now turn to the issue of nuclear-weapon-free zones. The development of nuclear-weapon-free zones reflects aspirations expressed regionally towards the ultimate global elimination of nuclear weapons. A nuclear-weapon-free zone can also be a vehicle to strengthen nuclear non-proliferation as well as to provide security assurances of a legally binding nature to non-nuclear-weapon States of the region concerned. At last year's session of the Disarmament Commission, many countries, including Japan, expressed their thoughts concerning the criteria for the establishment of an effective nuclear-weapon-free zone. We believe that those criteria are highly important for future consideration of such zones. As indicated in our working paper, the following four criteria are essential in order for a nuclear-weapon-free zone to be effective.

First, the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone should be supported by all countries concerned, including the nuclear-weapon States. Secondly, the zone should in no way jeopardize the peace and safety of the region concerned or of the world as a whole. Thirdly, appropriate safeguard measures, including inspection and verification measures, should be established in the zone. And fourthly, the zone should be established in conformity with the principles of international law, including that of free navigation on the high seas. It is with these criteria in mind that my country supports the establishment of additional nuclear-weapon-free zones.

Regarding the issue of a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, General Assembly resolution 52/38 F states, in effect, that subject to the emergence of a consensus on its objectives and agenda, the Assembly will convene a fourth special session devoted to disarmament. It maintains that the exact date and further organizational matters relating to the convening of the special session are subject to the outcome of the deliberations at this substantive session of the Disarmament Commission. The idea of having a special session of the General Assembly dedicated to the cause of disarmament seems to be appealing to many delegations, particularly since mankind has recently beheld the end of the cold war and will soon witness the unfolding of a new millennium.

The recent achievements and developments in disarmament, if put in a long-term perspective, are something to be commended. Remarkable progress is under way in the reduction of nuclear weapons. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons was extended indefinitely in 1995, with the collateral introduction of a mechanism to encourage further nuclear disarmament. Last April witnessed the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction, and the Preparatory Committee for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization is currently working. We are aware that a special session could catalyse further disarmament developments if we reach a common understanding as to its timing, purpose and agenda. In trying to establish such a common understanding, it is imperative to forge an agreement between the nuclear-weapon States and the non-nuclear-weapon States. We also have to take into account the fact that a fourth special session devoted to disarmament would have huge financial implications.

In concluding my statement, let me touch briefly on the rationalization of the work of the Disarmament Commission. We welcome the initiative taken by the new Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Dhanapala, to take a fresh look at the role of the Disarmament Commission. We will have to consider in due course how to reflect upon the outcome of his efforts. My delegation does not intend to prejudge the outcome, but I would like to express my delegation's preference for a shorter period for the substantive meetings of the Commission. This view is shared by many disciples of the disarmament cause — as all of us in this room are — whose possible creative contributions are being somewhat hampered by the burden of attending an almost uninterrupted series of meetings in various disarmament forums.

Mr. Soutar (United Kingdom): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — the associated country Cyprus, and the European Free Trade Area countries members of the European Economic Area, Iceland and Norway, align themselves with this statement.

At the outset, I would like to pass on my warmest congratulations to you, Sir, on your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission at its 1998 session. My best wishes go also to your predecessor, Ambassador

García of Colombia, for his skilful handling of last year's session.

Looking back on last year's session, there were in-depth discussions on all three substantive agenda items. Two of these were new, so the discussion concentrated on laying the foundations for future, more substantive work, hopefully leading to the adoption of agreed guidelines. But none of the three Working Groups was able to adopt more than a procedural report, and even then did so only with considerable difficulty. As the Presidency of the European Union at the time made clear, we are concerned about this development and urge all delegations to approach this year's session in a more constructive and flexible spirit.

This year the Commission will have on its agenda one item in its third year, the fourth special session devoted to disarmament (SSOD IV); and two in their second years, nuclear-weapon-free zones and guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament, with particular emphasis on consolidation of peace in the context of General Assembly resolution 52/38 G.

The members of the European Union continue to attach importance to the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones freely arrived at among States of the region concerned which strengthen regional and international peace and security. The advances in recent years in this area and the support given by nuclear-weapon States is to be applauded. The names Tlatelolco, Rarotonga and Pelindaba are now well ensconced in the lexicon of disarmament and arms control. Additionally, the nuclear-weapon States continue to be engaged in a constructive dialogue with the countries of South-East Asia on the Treaty of Bangkok. The ball is also beginning to roll on the establishment of a Central Asian nuclear-weapon-free zone. Last year's discussion at the Disarmament Commission usefully set the parameters for a more substantive debate this year. This year's debate might include the proposals for discussion of topics which were included in last year's final report and build upon the many useful contributions which were made last year. Among those was the European Union's list of elements conducive to the successful establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones.

This year the Disarmament Commission will address, for the last time, the topic of the fourth special session devoted to disarmament. We all approach this subject this year in the wake of the first General Assembly resolution on the subject since 1994 to be adopted by consensus: resolution 52/38 F. The European Union strongly hopes that this welcome development will be carried through the Disarmament Commission to enable a successful conclusion of the item this year.

The European Union continues to believe that SSOD IV should look at disarmament and non-proliferation issues in the security environment of today and tomorrow as we approach the start of the new millennium. The need for a revised, realistic and up-to-date disarmament agenda is well known. If SSOD IV is to fulfil its true potential and not go the same way as its two predecessors, there needs to be consensus on its objectives. In other words, the international community should agree on what it wants to get out of an SSOD IV. The special session should not be convened unless this consensus is present; to do so would invite a failure we cannot afford. As for the special session itself, the European Union continues to believe that its agenda should strike a balance between issues related to weapons of mass destruction and conventional issues.

The European Union has in the past attempted to build bridges between opposing views on SSOD IV at the General Assembly and at the Disarmament Commission. We have also submitted a number of constructive papers on what we see as the way forward. Indeed, last year we submitted a working paper which many were prepared to take as the basis for the Working Group's report. The members of the European Union look forward to a further constructive debate at this year's session and hope that it can contribute to realizing the long-elusive consensus we are all seeking.

The subject of conventional disarmament and arms control is one which cannot be ignored. In recent years many important voices, including the Secretary-General's, have highlighted the importance of addressing the question of conventional weapons. It is therefore only right that the Disarmament Commission devote at least part of its agenda to a conventional item. Since we last met here, the world has witnessed important progress in the drive to ban anti-personnel landmines. The proliferation of small arms has now taken centre stage. The horrific effects and problems caused by illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and their accumulation in certain regions are all too well known to the international community. The United Nations and the international community should continue to address these problems. We endorse the recommendations of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms and welcome the forthcoming designation of a new panel of experts, with a view to providing the international community

with some practical guidelines. The European Union itself is taking practical measures to take forward its programme on combating and preventing illicit trafficking in conventional arms: a workshop on small arms will take place in southern Africa next month.

The importance of regional and international peace and stability is universally recognized, and the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, which was established to promote greater transparency in arms transfers, to identify destabilizing accumulations of major weapons and thus to contribute to preventive diplomacy, is now in its sixth year. The European Union would like to take this opportunity once again to encourage all States to submit full returns to the Register. In addition, the European Union is currently considering proposals for a European Union code of conduct in arms exports, to set high common standards to govern arms exports from all European Union member States. We shall also in time be encouraging other major arms exporters to adopt a similar code.

The European Union looks forward to the second year of this particular conventional item, which is of course directly related to the General Assembly resolution on the consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures. The European Union welcomes the fact that resolution 52/38 G was adopted by consensus. As with the item on nuclear-weapon-free zones, the European Union feels that last year's useful discussion has set the parameters for a substantive and productive debate this year. Last year, much of the discussion concerned the scope of our work and whether this should be a broad range of conventional disarmament issues or focus on practical post-conflict measures. The European Union continues to believe that the latter approach will prove to be the more effective. A practical set of guidelines, related specifically to disarmament measures, which could be drawn upon in a post-conflict situation and which could help place such measures into a more coherent framework, addressing not only immediate but medium-term concerns, would be a valuable and worthwhile contribution which the Disarmament Commission could make. This would not duplicate work under way in other forums and would offer a distinct and concrete issue, well suited to the time available and to the working methods of the Disarmament Commission. To agree on such a set of guidelines would once again go a long way towards revitalizing the Commission.

The Disarmament Commission has in the last few years been successful in adopting a number of guidelines, in particular, in 1996, the report on recommendations on international arms transfers. Nevertheless, an honest assessment of the Commission in recent years would presumably show that we, as Member States, have failed to use this potentially important piece of the disarmament machinery to the full. The European Union believes that, if the Disarmament Commission is to maintain its value to Member States, it needs to reflect, as do all other disarmament institutions, on how it can improve itself. We therefore warmly welcome the adoption last December of General Assembly resolution 52/12 B on United Nations reform, which decided, *inter alia*, in paragraph 8, that the Disarmament Commission and the First Committee of the General Assembly should undertake a review of their work, to be concluded before the end of the fifty-second session, with a view to its "revitalization, rationalization and streamlining". The Union therefore hopes that, in accordance with the spirit of that consensus resolution, sufficient time can be set aside during the 1998 session for a debate, followed by decisions, on how best we can make the Disarmament Commission more effective and more productive. The European Union is ready to contribute constructively to such a debate.

More immediate procedural concerns of the European Union are the time allocated to the Disarmament Commission this year and that we make maximum use of the conference services allocated to us. Last year, too many meetings were poorly attended and ended early. The timetable left many gaps which might have been more productively used. The Working Groups should therefore be encouraged by their respective Chairmen to move expeditiously to the elaboration of texts. We need to improve further the working methods of the Commission and to use the time and resources allocated to our substantive work in the most efficient and economic manner. The European Union will be arguing strongly for meeting time during this year's session to be organized as efficiently and productively as possible and for the session to last no more than three weeks, including the introduction and adoption of the final reports of the subsidiary bodies and the report of the Commission itself. Under your guidance, Mr. Chairman, and with the support of the other members of the Bureau, this is an attainable goal. The many delegations whose members are involved in the Preparatory Committee for the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons would thus be enabled to leave in good time for its start in Geneva on 27 April.

In conclusion, the European Union looks forward to working constructively with you, Mr. Chairman, your Bureau and other delegations over the next three weeks to bring success on all the items on our agenda as well as a meaningful debate on the future direction of this important body.

Mr. García (Colombia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I should like at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of the Commission for this year's substantive session. We are convinced that under your leadership the Commission will successfully move forward in its deliberations. Towards that end, you can be assured of the cooperation of the Colombian delegation.

I wish also to convey our congratulations to the other members of the Bureau on their election for this session of the Commission.

This year the Commission is beginning its deliberations with a number of new and positive elements. We welcome the establishment of the Department of Disarmament Affairs, headed by Ambassador Dhanapala as Under-Secretary-General, as we do the intention of organizing the Department in a functional way, with units in New York in charge of issues relating to weapons of mass destruction, conventional disarmament and regional centres for disarmament and information, and with a branch in Geneva dealing with the Conference on Disarmament. This will allow us to handle the various aspects of disarmament in a more specialized and focused manner while giving the question the stature it deserves within the work of the United Nations.

The opportunity to work on issues in depth and the universality of its composition are two of the Disarmament Commission's essential elements and comparative advantages, as was envisaged in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. Here, issues are developed for future negotiating processes. Furthermore, the Commission has already identified a list of potential items for future agendas, and has thus overcome the difficulties that arose in the past on this subject.

The strengthening of the Commission was the subject of its deliberations in 1990, when certain changes were made in the manner of its functioning. We agreed that the work of the Commission could be organized even more efficiently. Among the various measures that could be taken, we believe that — with a view to appropriate participation by all delegations, including the smaller ones — a desirable one would be that the Working Groups not meet simultaneously.

We are beginning the third year of work on the item on the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (SSOD IV). It is clear that although we have not yet reached a consensus on the objectives and on the agenda of SSOD IV, some progress was made in this respect during last year's substantive session. My delegation naturally supports the position of the Non-Aligned Movement on this issue. Likewise, we believe that the document submitted by the Chairman of the Working Group on SSOD IV during the last substantive session contains elements on which we can make progress in our deliberations.

It is clearly appropriate to undertake a complete review of the status of all issues related to disarmament in the wake of the end of the cold war, and for that purpose the appropriate forum is undoubtedly SSOD IV. In this connection, we wish to highlight the constructive role of the Disarmament Commission in the development of the positions of Member States on SSOD IV, which led to the adoption by consensus of the resolution on the subject during the current session of the General Assembly.

The inclusion in our agenda, starting last year, of the item entitled "Establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned" reflects the growing contemporary importance of these zones. There is no doubt that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned strengthens the nuclear non-proliferation regime within the framework of nuclear disarmament objectives while promoting international peace and security at both the regional and global levels.

An intensive and constructive debate was held during the Commission's 1997 session, on which we must build. We are confident that during this substantive session it should be possible, in the relevant Working Group, further to define the framework of discussion and the scope of issues such as the role of nuclear-weapon-free zones as an instrument to strengthen peace, security and stability; the characteristics of the region, including its geographical definition; the relationship between existing zones and treaties; the role of verification and mechanisms for consultation and negotiation; and elements leading to the establishment of such zones.

It is important that the deliberations of the Group take into account the approaches of existing nuclear-weapon-free zones and yield concrete recommendations with a view to the establishment of other nuclear-weapon-free zones where none yet exist, including the Middle East and Central Asia, and the consolidation of the southern hemisphere and adjacent areas as a large nuclear-weapon-free zone.

The item "Guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament, with particular emphasis on consolidation of peace in the context of General Assembly resolution 51/45 N" is beginning its second year under deliberation in the Commission.

The recommendations and guidelines under discussion in the Working Group refer to tangible disarmament measures that can contribute to the consolidation of peace in the processes in which the United Nations participates. The usefulness of the guidelines is obvious and goes beyond the framework of the aforementioned processes. That is why it is a sterile and complex exercise to try specify who, beyond the United Nations, might be served by these guidelines, which, moreover, are neither imposed nor obligatory.

It is clear that emphasis must be placed on aspects falling within the sphere of disarmament, which is this Commission's field of activity. It is also clear that we must make maximum use of United Nations experience in various parts of the world, not only in conflicts themselves, but also in the process of post-conflict peace-building. Such experience should be carefully analysed in order to avoid counterproductive generalizations.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate our full readiness to cooperate with the Commission for the achievement of tangible results. That is the best way to strengthen it comprehensively.

The Chairman: There are still two delegations inscribed on my list of speakers for this meeting. I would urge delegations to inscribe themselves more actively on the list for this meeting and this afternoon's meeting in order to make more effective use of the time allotted to us.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): Our warmest congratulations go to you, Mr. Chairman, and to other members of the Bureau just elected. I am hopeful that, in your able hands, this substantive session of the Disarmament Commission will achieve its mandated goals.

This year's session of the Disarmament Commission assumes a special significance in view of the United Nations Secretariat's renewed emphasis on disarmament through the elevation of the Centre for Disarmament Affairs into the Department of Disarmament Affairs. We congratulate Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala on his well-deserved appointment to the post of Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs. We look forward to working closely with him. Personally, if I may say so, knowing and appreciating his abilities over the years as I do, it is a special pleasure for me to see him in his new position.

We are also pleased to see the retention of the posts of the heads of the United Nations Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament, which my delegation strongly supported at the main segment of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

It has been some time since the cold war ended. The end of ideological rift had a propitious impact on the prospects for disarmament. It is time that we seized the opportunity and advanced the cause of disarmament through rational and businesslike negotiations among States. It is important that we deliberate with open minds and refrain from taking a rigid attitude, which was symptomatic of the cold-war era.

The Disarmament Commission is the specialized deliberative body of the United Nations, entrusted with the task of the in-depth consideration of specific disarmament issues. We strongly support the work of this multilateral machinery. We believe that, in this forum, there is room for harmonious, professional-style work. The end products of such work will have a definite, positive impact on the disarmament scenario of the world. We also feel that it is a good idea to limit the work in the sessions of the Commission to a three-item phased agenda. This contributes to the efficiency of the Commission.

Bangladesh is committed by its Constitution to upholding the principle of general and complete disarmament. The total elimination of nuclear weapons is our professed goal. In October 1996, in her first statement before the General Assembly, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, said:

> "Nuclear weapons are an abomination and surely can have no place in a civilized world. This awareness clearly exists, and the desire for their elimination is also discernible... What is called for

now is the courage, confidence and initiative to pursue the nuclear disarmament agenda in all earnestness." [*Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Plenary Meetings*, 40th meeting, p. 9]

It is our view that nuclear-weapon-free zones can supplement global efforts towards our ultimate objective of a world free from all nuclear threats. The developments that have taken place in recent times in the field of nuclear-weapon-free zones are significant. We believe that the recent celebration of the anniversary of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, the signing of the Treaty of Rarotonga by the United Kingdom, the United States and France, and the signing of the Pelindaba Treaty are practical testimony to the continuing commitment of States to nuclear-weapon-free zones. We are also encouraged by the entry into force of the Bangkok Treaty on the South-east Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone last year. The 1997 Almaty Declaration by the Heads of State of five Central Asian countries laid the foundation of a new nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia. The General Assembly resolution adopted by consensus at its fifty-second session in support of the establishment of this zone also sends a positive signal for the prospects of its establishment.

Bangladesh stands in admiration of these positive developments. The work of the Commission on nuclear-weapon-free zones will help advance this positive trend. We appreciate the interest of delegations in the issue of nuclear-weapon-free zones, manifested by the submission of a large number of working papers at last year's session of the Commission. We hope that the Commission will be able to give thorough consideration to the issue at this session.

We call for an early convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (SSOD IV). It is time that the international community reviewed the implementation of the Final Document of the tenth special session of the General Assembly — which was the first special session devoted to disarmament — and took stock of the international security and disarmament situation in the post-cold-war era. While nuclear disarmament should remain the highest priority for us, we have to identify the emerging challenges presented by the new era and to form an agreed plan of action to deal with them in the true spirit of multilateralism. We believe that only a special session of the General Assembly can address the subject of disarmament with the comprehensiveness and thoroughness it deserves.

It is discouraging that the convening of SSOD IV has been a debated issue. However, it gives us some comfort to note that the Commission, at its last session, was able to come to a general agreement that SSOD IV would be convened — subject, of course, to the emergence of a consensus on its objective and agenda. This, we believe, is a positive development. Budgetary constraints notwithstanding, Bangladesh believes that that session would be useful in furthering the cause of general and complete disarmament. It is our sincere expectation that the Commission will be able to overcome all divergences and pave the way for SSOD IV to be a reality at the dawn of the new millennium.

While weapons of mass destruction remain one of the greatest menaces to human civilization, the heavy toll taken by conventional weapons cannot be overlooked. Excessive accumulations of such arms not commensurate with the legitimate security concerns of a country is also a major destabilizing factor. Millions of people in regional wars and conflicts have been victims of conventional weapons since the Second World War. It is a fact that developing countries are the major users and victims of conventional weapons. Therefore, developing countries should try to limit their acquisition of such weapons to levels justified by their legitimate security needs and in line with prioritization of the use of their resources. However, in order really to arrest the proliferation of conventional weapons, it is also the responsibility of the weapon-exporting countries to exercise restraint in selling these weapons. We are pleased to note that at last year's session the Commission made satisfactory progress in its work on guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament. We are optimistic that the guidelines will take final shape at this session of the Commission.

Before I conclude, I wish to emphasize the importance of transparency in armaments. None of our efforts at disarmament — whether treaties or mere guidelines — will be effective unless we can establish a foolproof regime of transparency in armaments. In this context, I would like to flag the point that transparency should be applied in a balanced manner. It should apply not just in the case of acquisitions but also in the cases of production, use, stockpiling and export of armaments.

Bangladesh hopes that, in its deliberations in the coming days, the Disarmament Commission will live up to the expectations of all of us. We will extend our unstinting support to you, Mr. Chairman, in your efforts for the success of the 1998 substantive session.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): I would like, Sir, to convey to you my delegation's congratulations on your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission. Being aware of your dedication to the cause of disarmament, we are confident that under your guidance our work will achieve substantive progress and success. Our felicitations go also to the other members of the Bureau on their election. We congratulate Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala on his well-deserved appointment to the post of Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs.

It is an undeniable truth that although the end of the cold war has reduced the threat of nuclear war, it has not eliminated the dangers posed by nuclear weapons. In recent months, we have witnessed a galaxy of former heads of State or Government, generals and admirals, some of whom commanded nuclear forces, drawing our attention to the sheer destructiveness of nuclear weapons. Their comments are powerful statements of common concern and reflect mounting support for the abolition of nuclear weapons, a goal which has global implications and which remains an imperative. Hence, our main focus in the disarmament agenda should continue to be to seek further deep reductions in the current stockpiles with a view to their ultimate total elimination, while curbing vertical and horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons and banning fissile materials for weapons purposes.

The endeavours to establish nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the regions concerned have demonstrated that regional initiatives have once again proved to be successful and are widely acknowledged as significant contributions to nuclear disarmament. The numerous working papers submitted in this regard reflect the sustained interest of many Member States not only to establish such zones where they do not exist but also to solidify those that have been established in various regions of the world. They also deal with the security, political and legal issues involved and identify pertinent questions for further consideration during the current session of the Disarmament Commission. My delegation remains hopeful that in-depth consideration of the various ideas and approaches already advanced will lead to substantive progress on the formulation of guidelines and recommendations for the establishment of new nuclear-weapon-free zones as a viable modality to enhance peace and security, both globally and regionally.

As far as a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament is concerned, the non-paper submitted by the Non-Aligned Movement offers a sufficiently broad framework to arrive at a common understanding on how to proceed with the task of convening such a session. While taking into account the disparate attempts made by the international community to limit armaments in the post-cold-war era, a special session devoted to disarmament will streamline those endeavours and will provide us with an opportunity to appraise the current international situation, especially in the light of the vital objective of ending the incessant arms race and achieving substantial progress in disarmament, and to assess the implementation or non-implementation of decisions, resolutions and treaty provisions. In these endeavours, the reports of the Disarmament Commission and the Conference on Disarmament, as well as a review of relevant General Assembly resolutions and the status of negotiations in bilateral and multilateral forums, will provide significant inputs.

Such an assessment will prove useful and instructive, as valuable conclusions can be drawn from the achievements and failures of the past 10 years. It would therefore be more productive if under the agenda items proposed by the Non-Aligned Movement it proved possible to recognize and stress the positive elements and new insights on the disarmament process gained over the past decade, to acknowledge the negative aspects and setbacks, and thereby to give a fresh new impetus to our continuing efforts. This calls for a positive and constructive attitude with regard both to the review of the past and to guidelines for the future.

As regards the specific subjects to be considered at a special session, it bears reiterating that the question of nuclear disarmament in all its aspects should be given more focus. But attention should also be focused on other issues as well, including, *inter alia* the reduction of armed forces and conventional armaments. A fourth special session on disarmament should also pronounce itself unambiguously on the need to enhance and strengthen the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament and should agree on practical measures to increase the effectiveness of the existing disarmament machinery.

Beyond doubt, there is a clear and urgent need to reassess our thinking and approaches towards disarmament and related issues. This will open a window of opportunity to achieve security for all States at lower levels of armaments. The task ahead calls for both vision and foresight concerning our objectives and the agenda

for a special session devoted to disarmament. Indonesia remains confident that Member States can collectively endeavour to respond to the General Assembly's call and to seek a consensus. In doing so, we can further the cause of arms limitation and disarmament.

Deliberations last year on the third substantive item on our agenda reflected the concerns of a number of Member States regarding the scope and approaches that may be envisioned on an issue that is admittedly complex. Hence, the task would seem to be formidable. It calls, among other things, for confidence-building measures and restraint in armaments in order to forestall turmoil and instability in the post-conflict era. These measures are to be undertaken, in coordination with a programme for disarmament, to stem the proliferation of weapons, to prevent illicit arms acquisitions and to demobilize and reintegrate former combatants into unified armed forces. These and other measures would have to be coordinated into an integrated approach by the Member States as well as by regional and subregional organizations involved in ensuring security and stability and in rebuilding societies with a view to achieving socio-economic development. In our view, such complex issues would necessarily have to be examined at the highest political levels for them to evolve into a concrete plan of action.

In conclusion, my delegation regards the papers presented last year by the Chairmen of the three Working Groups as balanced texts which could provide a useful basis to structure our deliberations. These could be supplemented by the working papers already submitted by States or groups of States, which have also identified issues for further elaboration and advanced new ideas, approaches and concepts. We would also welcome new input intended to resolve our differences. With these things taken together, we can envision the formulation of principles, guidelines and recommendations for negotiation on specific disarmament issues. The successful conclusion of these endeavours would no doubt contribute to the fulfilment of the mandate entrusted to the Disarmament Commission by the General Assembly and thereby demonstrate the continuing utility and indispensable role of this forum. We firmly believe that the Disarmament Commission can continue to make a constructive contribution to progress towards the goal of arms limitation and disarmament. That the work of the Commission is important, especially at this crucial juncture, needs no emphasis. My delegation pledges its continuing support in our common endeavours to enhance the Commission's role in multilateral disarmament efforts.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.